

When it comes to the environment, education affects our actions

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The first set of findings from the survey are based on data from more than 22,000 individuals and show that people with degrees are 25% more likely, on average, than people with no education qualifications to adopt pro-environmental behaviours, at least in terms of paying more for environmentally-friendly products. However, they are less likely to turn off the TV overnight or to use public transport.

Overall the survey, which will follow 40,000 UK households over many years, found that 60% of people believed that a major environmental disaster is pending if things continue on their current course, and just over half the respondents (53%) say they 'do quite a few things that are environmentally friendly' or are 'environmentally friendly in most things or everything' they do.

Nonetheless, people's willingness to behave in an environmentally-friendly way comes with conditions as 59% of those surveyed agreed that 'any changes I make to help the [environment](#) need to fit in with my lifestyle' and just half (50%) would be prepared to pay more for environmentally friendly products.

Professor Peter Lynn at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) which manages Understanding Society at the University of Essex, said: "These findings offer an interesting suggestion that more highly-educated people may be more willing to take environmentally-motivated principled actions such as buying recycled paper products or avoiding the purchase of over-packaged products and yet are less willing

than others to take relatively small actions that may be more of a personal inconvenience."

The survey found that:

- women are more likely than men to adopt pro-environmental behaviours, for example they are 4% more likely, on average, to be willing to pay more for environmentally-friendly products;
- the presence of dependent children in the household is associated with a lower willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products;
- employed people seem less likely to adopt pro-environmental behaviours – especially by putting on more clothes when cold and reducing the frequency of flights – than people who are outside the labour market.

Understanding Society also reveals that a significant minority have a defeatist attitude towards combating climate change. One in five (21%) think that it is too late to do anything about climate change and nearly a third (29%) believe it is not worth Britain trying to combat [climate change](#), because other countries will just cancel out what we do.

Professor Lynn added: "These initial findings suggest that people's behaviour is motivated by considerations other than environmental concern such as income and personal resources. These motivations need to be better understood if policy makers and civil society organisations looking to change people's behaviours are to make any genuine headway. There clearly remains across all sections of society a considerable reluctance to take part in environmentally-friendly behaviour that has a personal cost, even though the importance of doing so is recognised by

the majority of people."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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